

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

**This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:**

**LISTING OF CLAIMS:**

1. (previously presented): A laser apparatus comprising:  
  
a plurality of semiconductor laser elements which emit laser beams, respectively;  
  
a multimode optical fiber which has a light-entrance end and a light-emission end;  
  
an optical condensing system which collects the laser beams emitted from said plurality of semiconductor laser elements, and couples the collected laser beams to said light-entrance end of said multimode optical fiber; and  
  
a protection member which is arranged at said light-emission end of the multimode optical fiber, protects the light-emission end from an atmosphere, and has a light-emission window located at at least a predetermined distance from the light-emission end.
2. (original) A laser apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said protection member is made of a transparent material, and comprises a first face fixed to said light-emission end of said multimode optical fiber and a second face being located opposite to the first face and realizing said light-emission window.
3. (withdrawn): A laser apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said protection member is a sealed container which is fixed to said multimode optical fiber in a vicinity of said light-

emission end so that the sealed container contains the light-emission end, said sealed container having a glass window being located opposite to the light-emission end to realize said light-emission window, and inert gas being sealed in the container.

4. (withdrawn): A laser apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said protection member is a sealed container which is fixed to said multimode optical fiber in a vicinity of said light-emission end, said sealed container having an inlet port, and outlet port, and a glass window, the inlet port and the outlet port being connected to a gas circulation system for circulating inert gas through the sealed container, and the glass window being located opposite to the light-emission end to realize said light-emission window.

5. (withdrawn): A laser apparatus according to claim 4, wherein said gas circulation system comprises a filter for removing contaminants contained in gas discharged from said outlet ports.

6. (original): A laser apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said multimode optical fiber has a core diameter of 100 micrometers or smaller at said light emission end.

7. (original): A laser apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said plurality of semiconductor laser elements are made of GaN-based compound semiconductor materials.

8. (previously presented): The laser apparatus of claim 1, wherein the plurality of semiconductor laser elements comprise plural laser diodes mounted to a common heat dissipating substrate.

9. (previously presented): The laser apparatus of claim 1, wherein the predetermined distance is a distance sufficient to reduce a density of light at the light-emission window to less than or equal to approximately 1/1000 of a density of light at the light emission end.

10. (previously presented): The laser apparatus of claim 2 wherein a thickness of the transparent material is greater than or equal to 2 mm.

11. (new): The laser apparatus of claim 1 wherein the light-emission end of the multimode optical fiber lies outside of a housing package.